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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TASHKENT 000802

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TAGS: [SOCI](#) [SCUL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [CVIS](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: (CORRECTED COPY) WORRYING TRENDS IN EDUCATION

REF: A) TASHKENT 634 B) TASHKENT 377 C) 05 TASHKENT

2517 D) 05 TASHKENT 3140

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Classified By: AMB. JON R. PURNELL, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B, D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Politics continue to play a defining role in education in Uzbekistan. In a reflection of its close ties to Moscow, the GOU is considering increasing the number of hours of compulsory Russian language classes. Teachers have been instructed to inform the Ministry of Education if any NGO contacts them. Students have been warned not to apply for study programs in Western countries. IREX, which handled U.S. exchange programs, has been shut down. Law students were also prevented from participating in a humanitarian law workshop sponsored by the International Committee of the Red Cross in Kyrgyzstan. University students are required to attend "Karimov studies" courses devoted to the President's books and speeches, and are now subject to expulsion for missing lectures. Meanwhile, children of the elite continue to study in the U.S. End summary.

RUSSIFICATION OF EDUCATION?

¶2. (C) Several education experts with close ties to the Ministry of Education told Poloff that GOU officials are considering increasing the number of hours of Russian language classes in primary and secondary schools. A consultant working for the USAID-funded NGO "Academy for Educational Development" (AED) told Poloff that a decree to this effect might be issued this summer, to allow time for the changes to take effect before the beginning of the new academic year. While some media reports in past months indicate that Russian language class hours have already increased, our sources tell us that no official decision has yet been made. (Note: The AED consultant added that school directors already have authority to slightly vary hours allotted to each class while staying within the established curriculum framework. End note.) Following the signing of the November 2005 Russia-Uzbekistan partnership agreement, there were rumors that more Russian language teachers would be hired. (Note: The government may be trying to attract back some of the many teachers who have left for Russia and Kazakhstan in search of better paying jobs. End note.) A recent Presidential decree

providing for the opening of a Moscow State University branch in Tashkent in the fall (ref A), is another sign of Russia's renewed influence in the educational sphere.

GOVERNMENT BARS STUDENTS FROM STUDYING IN WESTERN COUNTRIES

13. (C) A Ministry of Education decree released in August 2005 effectively imposed a blanket prohibition on any cooperation between Uzbek education institutions and Western organizations without prior approval by the government (ref B). The Head of the Ministry of Higher Education's International Relations Department told one of our contacts that the GOU has ordered schools and universities not to provide transcripts or any other information to students seeking to apply to study in Western countries. Several recent incidents relayed to Poloff confirm this information. One contact told Poloff that her relative, an applicant to the U.S. high school Youth Exchange Opportunity program, was unable to obtain an official transcript from her school, or even a simple letter noting her student status. Despite the student's pleas that the documents were needed for her "transport card application" and because she wanted to "volunteer for an international organization," the school principal refused to issue them. The principal accused the student of lying, expressing fear that the documents were for a U.S. high school program application, and warned the student that she would be barred from ever returning to the school if she studied in the United States. The principal also added that applying to a U.S. educational program would create serious problems for the school.

14. (C) Many international organizations have faced difficulties sending students abroad for training. For example, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Central Asia Regional Delegation deputy director

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told Poloff that law students were barred from participating in the ICRC's International Humanitarian Law regional moot court competition in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan, scheduled for early May. The MFA told the ICRC that it was "unsafe" for Uzbek students to visit Kyrgyzstan.

15. (C) According to a National University of Uzbekistan student, friends of his at another university were told in 2005 that they would be expelled for studying in U.S. undergraduate programs. However, students are being encouraged to study at Russian universities. Russian-Uzbek cooperation in higher education is clearly expanding, as evidenced by the planned opening of a Moscow State University branch in Tashkent (ref A).

TEACHERS TOLD NOT TO SPEAK WITH NGOS

16. (C) In line with the August 2005 Ministry of Education decree, an education expert formerly affiliated with the Open Society Institute, and whose NGO conducts training for teachers, told Poloff that the ministry had sent letters to all schools asking teachers to inform the ministry if any NGO ever seeks to contact them. Upon receiving this letter, the rector of one Tashkent high school withdrew her teachers from the training program.

MANDATORY "KARIMOV STUDIES" COURSES

17. (C) Several National University of Uzbekistan master's degree students told Poloff that they were required to attend seminars devoted to President Karimov's speeches and policies on February 7 and 14. The students said that the seminars were much stricter than in past years, when they could skip "Soviet-type" lectures devoted to Karimov without penalty. Anyone skipping the February seminars was

told they would face expulsion. Professors and lecturers were warned they would be fired unless they taught the seminars.

¶18. (C) These three-hour long "Karimov Vedenie" ("Karimov studies") seminars were organized by the University's "Democratization Department" and counted as official exams. (Note: At the University of World Economy and Diplomacy the lectures were held under the auspices of the Philosophy and Social Science department. End note.) According to the students, most of their 40-50 classmates were sleeping or talking throughout the lecture, with some chatting on their mobile phones. Several of the lectures covered the May 2005 Andijon events, and alleged that the United States was responsible for the unrest. NGOs were described as constituting "one of the world's worst evils." A lecturer also criticized the U.S. presence at the Karshi-Khanabad airbase, to which our contact told us that he had raised his hand and noted that the U.S. had vacated K2 back in November 2005. The seminar included an oral examination with questions on "Uzbekistan's democratic model," as laid out in Karimov's books. It also touched on the role of international NGOs, which were described as "spies, doing bad things."

LACK OF ACCESS TO INDEPENDENT INFORMATION

¶19. (C) Graduate students from the National University told Poloff that three Internet resource centers at their University have been shut down since June 2004, hampering research possibilities: the OSCE Internet Cafe, the Civic Education Center, and the Open Society Institute library. Students are facing a shortage of adequate research materials. One student said that books such as Samuel Huntington's "Third Wave of Democratization" are very difficult to find, and can only be obtained through purchase on the Internet, which is prohibitively expensive.

¶10. (C) A National University student also told Poloff that many high ranking University officials have been replaced by hard-core Karimov loyalists. The somewhat open Dean of the National University, Gulmira Yusupova, was, for example, replaced by Bahodir Hasanov, who reportedly does not have an academic background. Farhod Tolipov, a U.S. exchange alumnus, was fired from his position as professor at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in September 2005 after writing an article criticizing the expulsion of the U.S. airbase at Karshi-Khanabad (ref C). Former FM Sodik Safaev, known to be positively disposed toward the U.S., was removed as Rector of the University of World Economy and Diplomacy in late 2005 (ref D).

PROTECTING THE ELITES WHILE DENYING OPPORTUNITIES TO THE MASSES

¶11. (C) Comment: Despite the restrictions on student exchange programs to western countries, there are several hundred Uzbeks studying in the United States, many of whom are children of the elite whose families can afford the tuition fees. We fully expect that the GOU's clampdown on studying in the United States will continue to target the masses while exempting privileged children; the GOU's approach to education, as in many other areas, is very self serving. End comment.